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JOHN OWEN EDWARDS

My name is John Owen Edwards, Warrant Officer Class 1, Royal Corps of Signals. I was the N.C.O. in charge of the Signal Section attached to the 155th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, 11th (Indian) Division, in Northern Malaya based at Sungai Patani. I was captured at Singapore on the surrender of the garrison on the 15th February, 1942.

In October, 1942, with about 1,200 men of the 80th Anti Tank Regiment, R.A., 155th Field Regiment, R.A., 5th Field Regiment, R.A. and 11th (Indian) Divisional Signals, R.C.S., I was put on board the 'England Maru' at Singapore Docks. We were supposed to be what the Japanese asked for .. "a party of not necessarily fit men for light work". The 'England Maru' was an old cargo ship of 5,000 tons, built in 1905, according to the maker's record plates. It was filthy, verminous, and the hold I was confined in had evidently been used to carry horses or cattle before. There was dried excreta on the walls and floor. For three days we lay in Singapore Harbour. I was in a hold about 30 yards by 20 yards crammed in with 257 other men. Our food consisted of a watery soup with a few vegetables floating on top (about half-a-pint) and some rice twice per day -- morning and evening. At midday a small meal of rice only was provided. The only drinking water was salty, it seemed to me like steamed sea-water. The thirst was maddening. We were confined in the holds and could not get at the water tank. Latrine facilities were abominable, at first only 4 dock latrines for 1,200 men, this was later increased to 8. They were wooden troughs always heaped up with excreta and in a filthy condition and flies abounded. Men were allowed to the latrines only one at a time, as diarrhea and dysentery was rife this was sheer torture to men this affected. There were no washing facilities, after the voyage started we were allowed on deck for approximately 1 hour per day. 3 men actually died on the journey from the terrible conditions.